3: Underhill E-5 (1931-1935) 1936
NU28 Papago NU28

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PAPAGO WOMAN

FOREWORD

THE Papago Indians live on three reservations in the southwest corner of Arizona, near the Mexican border. They belong to the Piman-Sonoran language group and are, in language and descent, identical with the Pima whom they call River People, while they themselves are Desert People. Both were found by the Spaniards in the country they now occupy, which extends from the Gila River in Arizona to the Altar River in Sonora, and which once constituted the ancient Spanish province of Upper Pimeria.

The first important contact of the Whites with Pimeria was at the end of the seventeenth century when the famous missionary, explorer, and business executive, Father Kino established his chain of missions in the Altar Valley. He made a few extensions into the present Arizona, notably at San Xavier, near the present Tucson, and he also toured the whole of Pimeria, not once but many times, distributing cattle and seeds, and baptizing the people with Spanish names. It was in his day that the Papago learned to spend the rainless and hungry winters at the pleasant Altar missions, learning the eighteenth century Spanish methods of farming, which some of them practise to this day.

But the desert country did not attract Spanish colonization. After Kino's time, such Spanish traits as reached the Papago were adopted after their yearly visits to Mexico, rather than forced on them by close contact. Pimeria adhered technically to the Spanish colonial system by which the head man of each village was elected by the people and confirmed in office by the provincial governor. But the lieutenant governor, the sheriff, and the church officers who should have completed the picture, were nonexistent. Church services were a form, continued side by side with the ancient ceremonies which persisted with a vitality impossible in the subjugated provinces of Mexico.

This condition of slow acculturation persisted until the Gadsden purchase in 1853. With this change, Pimeria was cut violently in two, the new international boundary running through its lower portion, the home of the Papago, and leaving half of them in the United States and half in Mexico. It was to Mexico that the Papago felt allegiance, for their desert country was still forbidding to both miners and ranchers, and they were left to follow their old customs almost unmolested. Not so with the Pima. Their fertile land, along the Gila, was directly in the track of the gold rush, the trappers, and the Apache fighters. The Pima supplied all these travellers with grain, and early established a relationship which made for swift acculturation not to Mexican standards but to American.